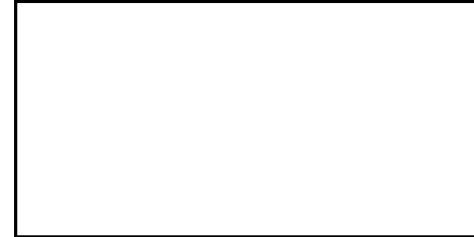


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ARAB STATES - ISRAEL: The Egyptian-Israeli military disengagement talks are expected to get under way today or tomorrow in Geneva.

Cairo underscored the importance it attaches to the talks and the care with which it is making its own preparations for them by keeping Foreign Minister Fahmi in Geneva--the only foreign minister to remain after last week's opening session of the Geneva peace conference. Fahmi, who held a series of discussions during the past few days with US, Soviet, and UN representatives to the conference and conducted several working sessions with the Egyptian delegation, reportedly will return to Cairo today. According to press reports, Egyptian Brigadier General Magdub will remain behind to head Egypt's delegation.

Israel's delegation chief, Major General Gur, will arrive in Geneva today from Tel Aviv after conferring with Prime Minister Meir, Deputy Prime Minister Alon, Foreign Minister Eban, and Defense Minister Dayan. Dayan yesterday told Israeli newspaper editors that the chances are better than even that a separation of forces can be arranged at Geneva.

According to press accounts, Prime Minister Rifai said upon his return to Amman from Geneva over the weekend that a Jordanian delegation will go back to Geneva in January to hold disengagement talks with Israel concurrent with those between Tel Aviv and Cairo.

The Soviets, meanwhile, reportedly told a member of the Israeli parliament who was in Geneva last week that Syria is prepared to submit a list of its Israeli POWs once Israel withdraws to the October 22 cease-fire lines. Damascus would be prepared to return wounded Israeli POWs when Israel withdraws to the lines existing prior to October 6, and the remaining POWs when Israel withdraws to its pre-1967 borders. This same Israeli MP reportedly was told by members of the Egyptian delegation that Syria holds a total of 28 POWs.

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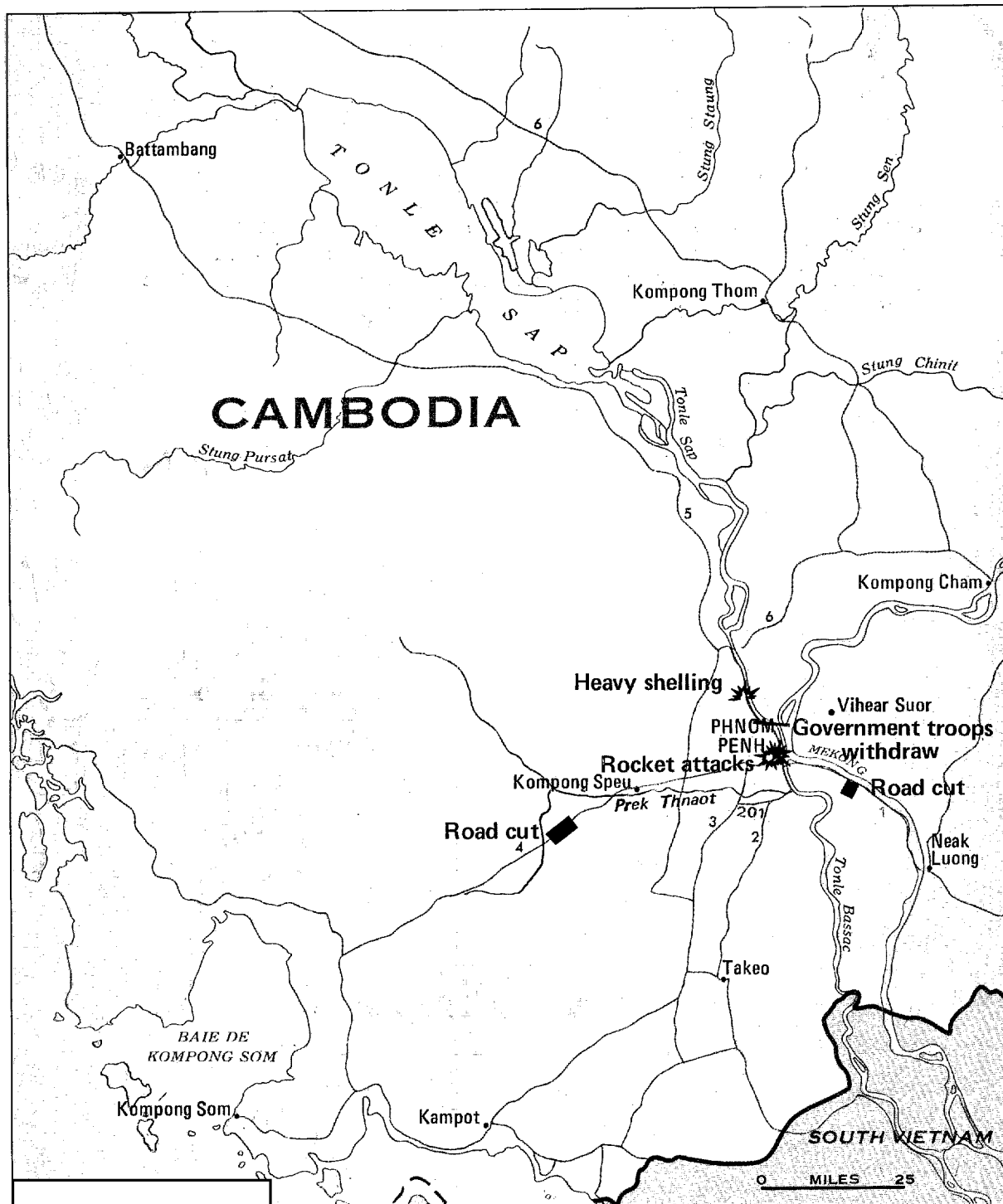
Numerous incidents were reported along the Suez front over the past two days, with Tel Aviv reportedly lodging 45 complaints with the UN Emergency Force over Egyptian cease-fire violations. An Israeli military spokesman reported that the Syrian front, however, was quiet yesterday for the eighth consecutive day.

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CAMBODIA: Rocket attacks against Phnom Penh for the third day in a row did little damage, but Communist activity along the east bank of the Mekong River may lead to heavier pressure against the capital.

Government-held villages ten miles upstream from Phnom Penh have been under continuous heavy shelling, and government troops have been forced to withdraw from one post five miles north of the capital. If the Communists were to control this area, Phnom Penh would be within easy range of their artillery. Communist forces also are attacking government positions downstream near the Vietnamese border, isolating some units.

Government clearing operations along Routes 4 and 5 are stalled, and both roads remain cut in several places. On December 21 and 22, government units abandoned two posts on Route 4 west of Kompong Speu, leaving behind two 105-mm howitzers and sizable quantities of small arms. Also over the weekend, Communist forces cut Route 1 some eight miles southeast of Phnom Penh. According to late press reports the Cambodian high command yesterday claimed to have reopened the highway.

AFGHANISTAN: President Daoud, reacting to a supposed coup attempt on December 19, has arrested about 100 persons and imposed a military alert. Those detained include a former chief of the secret service, a former deputy prime minister, religious leaders, and military officers. In addition, the government on December 22 announced the execution of a number of persons involved in last September's coup attempt and severe sentences for others.

Although a coup may indeed have been in the works last week, Daoud's actions may have been designed simply to intimidate potential plotters. Since last September's coup attempt, Daoud has been preoccupied with consolidating his power. He now appears firmly in control, and the US Embassy believes there is no viable alternative to him in the short run.

Relations with Pakistan and Iran have deteriorated since Daoud's assumption of power, with Kabul charging interference in Afghan internal affairs. It is likely that Islamabad and Tehran will be accused of involvement in this latest series of events.

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PHILIPPINES: President Marcos is preparing for possible antigovernment protests around December 30, the day his elected term expires. To counter any opposition plans, the government recently arrested several dissident leaders and placed the armed forces on alert through mid-January.

Marcos asserts that the legality of his tenure after December 30 is not at issue, because the 1935 constitution under which he was elected has been superseded. He bases his continuation in office on the 1973 constitution, ratified last January by citizens' assemblies at the local level. Marcos' political opponents charge that the ratification process was unconstitutional, however, and that therefore the 1935 constitution remains in effect.

Although some anti-Marcos demonstrations may occur in Manila during the next week, it seems unlikely that any group will be able to organize large-scale protests. The constitutional issue does not strike a responsive chord among most Filipinos, who are more concerned about steadily rising living costs. The departure of many students and urban residents for the Christmas holidays also lessens the chances for trouble.

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FOR THE RECORD*

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[REDACTED]

International Oil: Arab oil ministers decided yesterday to ease their oil embargo by increasing production 10 percent in January, instead of cutting it an additional 5 percent as previously planned. The embargo against the US and Holland, however, will not be lifted at this time, according to Saudi Oil Minister Yamani. [REDACTED]

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Middle East - Africa - Vatican: Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and President Numayri of Sudan, accompanied by Liberia's vice president and Zambia's foreign minister, held a lengthy meeting with Pope Paul on December 22, primarily to discuss the future status of Jerusalem. The African leaders--an Orthodox Christian, a Muslim, a Protestant, and a Catholic--later also met with Italian President Leone, according to press accounts. [REDACTED]

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Turkey: After trying unsuccessfully for ten days to form a national coalition government, caretaker Prime Minister Naim Talu yesterday asked President Koruturk to allow him to give up his efforts. Talu told journalists after his meeting with Koruturk that the President would take additional political soundings before making a decision, possibly by tomorrow, on the request. [REDACTED]

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**These items were prepared by CIA without consultation with the Departments of State and Defense.*

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